



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 4 February 2025

by V Goldberg BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 25th February 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/K0425/D/24/3347260

Vale Cottage, Askett Village Lane, Askett, Buckinghamshire HP27 9LT

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs Roberts against the decision of Buckinghamshire Council - West Area (Wycombe).
 - The application Ref is 24/05454/FUL.
 - The development proposed is the erection of external staircase to garage.
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Decision

1. The appeal is allowed and planning permission is granted for the construction of external staircase to existing detached garage to facilitate use of first floor as home office ancillary to Vale Cottage at Vale Cottage, Askett Village Lane, Askett, Buckinghamshire HP27 9LT in accordance with the terms of the application, Ref 24/05454/FUL, subject to the following conditions:
 - 1) The development hereby permitted shall begin not later than three years from the date of this decision.
 - 2) The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with drawing nos VCGC/01 and VCGC/03.
 - 3) The external materials of the staircase hereby permitted shall match those used in the existing building.

Procedural Matters

2. The description of development in the banner heading above has been taken from the planning application form. However, in Part E of the appeal form, it is stated that the description of development has changed, and I have been provided with written confirmation that a revised description was agreed between the main parties. This is the description used on the decision notice and the appeal form. Accordingly, I have used the revised description in the formal decision paragraph above as it more accurately describes the appeal proposal.
3. Since the appeal was made, a revised National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 12 December 2024. I have taken the revised Framework into account as part of the determination of this appeal.
4. On 22 November 2023, all designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB's) in England and Wales became 'National Landscapes' (NLs). I have therefore made reference to NLs in my Decision and specifically referred to the Chilterns AONB as the Chilterns NL.

Main Issues

5. The appeal site is within the Green Belt, so the main issues are:
- whether the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the Framework and any relevant development plan policies; and;
 - the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area, having particular regard to the effect on the Chilterns NL, the significance of the Askett Conservation Area (CA), as a designated heritage asset, through development within it, and the significance of the non-designated heritage (NDHA) asset known as Vale Cottage, through development within its setting.

Reasons

Inappropriate development

6. Paragraph 154 of the Framework sets out exceptions whereby development is not inappropriate in the Green Belt. One of these exceptions is the extension or alteration of a building, provided it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. Policy CP8 of the Wycombe District Local Plan 2019 (WDLP) aligns with the Framework and seeks to protect the Green Belt from inappropriate development.
7. Further to the above, policy DM43 of the WDLP seeks to control volumetric increases to residential outbuildings. Section 2 of this policy states that any increase in the volume of residential outbuildings will only be considered appropriate development when all of the five listed conditions are met. Conflict with criteria a), b) and e) is alleged.
8. The Council considers that the area beneath the staircase generates a volume. However, the proposed external stair does not enclose a space to create a volume. The area beneath it is open and can be walked under and the stair and platform would not be enclosed. Consequently, it is not possible to calculate volume when an area is not contained. Accordingly, the staircase would neither be an alteration to the building that would increase its volume, nor would the staircase itself result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building. Therefore, the proposal would not conflict with criteria a) or b) of policy DM43.
9. In regard to criterion e), whilst the existing detached garage would exceed 4 metres in height, it has not been put to me that the staircase itself would exceed 4 metres. Nevertheless, Section 2 of Policy DM43 relates to the 'erection of residential outbuildings'. As the proposal is for an external staircase to serve an existing outbuilding, and not a new outbuilding, any conflict with this criterion would not be determinative in these circumstances.
10. For the reasons given above, I conclude that the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt as it would be compliant with policies CP8 and DM43 of the WDLP and the Framework. These policies, in combination, seek to prevent inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Character and Appearance

11. The appeal site is located within the Askett Conservation Area and Vale Cottage is considered to be a NDHA. The garage at the appeal site lies approximately 20m away from Vale Cottage and is of a simple timber construction, and slate roof. The garage sits discreetly within the site and given its modest design and scale, it is seen as a secondary outbuilding, respectful of the primary red brick building of Vale Cottage.
12. The significance of the CA, for the purposes of this appeal, is derived by its central historic core, the historic nature of many of its buildings and the verdant spaces which exist between them. The Askett CA Character Survey (1996) specifically refers to the appeal site, identified as 'Askett House Cottage', noting that it is a 'charming, simple, rural cottage of brick with blue headers in the roadside elevation. In the past it was occupied by farm labourers to Askett House'. Consequently, the character and historical architectural built form of Vale Cottage reinforces some of the characteristics identified above that contribute towards the significance of the CA.
13. The date of the character survey is noted, and I acknowledge that it was written before the extension to Vale Cottage was granted in 2005. However, by virtue of its architectural and historical built form, and it being identified as an 'other significant building' in the CA Character Survey, I also consider Vale Cottage to be a non-designated heritage asset of moderate significance. The garage which the proposal is related to, due to its proximity to Vale Cottage, forms part of its setting.
14. The proposed external stair would have a simple traditional design that would be appropriate to the agricultural appearance of the garage. It would be sensitively positioned on the far side of the garage, at the furthest possible distance from Vale Cottage, which would be almost completely out of site from the cottage, due to the built form of the existing garage. Whilst the supports for the platform would be in front of the ground floor window, they would not cover the window given their slim profile. The staircase would be in front of a small section of the top of the door but the open balustrade results in this section of the door remaining visible. Notably, the proposal would also allow Vale Cottage to remain the primary building on the appeal site. Accordingly, the proposal would not harm the character and appearance of the area, nor would it harm the positive contribution the appeal site makes towards the significance of both the CA nor the NDHA.
15. Reference is made to there being limited examples of external staircases attached to outbuildings in the area. However, the appellant has drawn my attention to an earlier planning application in Askett on another property which included an external staircase to a garage¹. Therefore, the proposal would not be entirely incongruous to Askett. Nevertheless, I have determined this appeal on its own merits, and I have found the proposal would be a suitable and sympathetic addition to the existing outbuilding and to the wider area.
16. Furthermore, rather than be 'unjustified clutter', as the Council have argued, the proposal by virtue of its rational and discreet position and its traditional appearance, would be an acceptable alteration in these circumstances.

¹ Application Ref 05/06446/FUL

17. Whilst the Chilterns NL has not been referred to in the reasons for refusal, I note that the Council's delegated report alleges harm to the Chilterns NL, the designation of which is afforded the highest status of protection, as explained in paragraph 189 of the Framework. However, I have found that the proposal would be suitable and that there would be no harm to the character and appearance of the area. Therefore, this would also ensure that the landscape and scenic beauty of the NL would be conserved.
18. For the above reasons, I conclude the proposed development would preserve the character and appearance of the area, having particular regard to the Chilterns NL, the significance of the Askett Conservation Area (CA), as a designated heritage asset, through development within it, and the significance of the NDHA known as Vale Cottage, through development within its setting. It would therefore be compliant with policies CP9, CP11, DM31 and DM35 of the WDLP. These policies seek high quality design which conserves the natural and historic environment. Development should conserve the significance, special interest, character and appearance of designated and non-designated heritage assets. The development also complies with the Framework where it requires consideration to be given to the impact of a proposal on the significance of a designated heritage asset, and great weight to be given to the asset's conservation. It would also comply with the Framework in regard to the conservation of the landscape and scenic beauty of the NL, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.

Conditions

19. In addition to the standard time condition, it is necessary for a condition to list the approved plans in the interest of certainty.
20. A condition is required to control the external finish of the development, to ensure high quality design and to preserve the character and appearance of the CA.

Conclusion

21. For the reasons given above the appeal is allowed.

V Goldberg

INSPECTOR